



Congressional First Responders' Homeland Security Survey Results

While North Carolina's first responders are working hard to protect our community against a possible attack, they don't have the resources they need to do the job effectively. That's what they told Congressmen David Price, Bob Etheridge and Brad Miller in response to surveys assessing the area's vulnerability.

The Congressmen requested and received survey responses from police, fire, and EMS departments in towns and cities throughout Wake, Durham, Orange, Chatham, Cumberland, Franklin, Harnett, Johnston, Lee, Nash, Sampson, Vance, Guilford, Rockingham and Alamance Counties.

Highlights of the survey results include:

- There is significant variation in the steps that local police and fire departments have taken to prepare themselves for a possible attack.
- Departments say the Triangle faces at least a moderate level of risk because of its proximity to a metropolitan area including Research Triangle Park, an international airport, several major universities and a nuclear power plant. The Piedmont Triad's first responders say they face a low to moderate level of risk due to their proximity to a major transportation corridor, international airport and power plant.
- Nearly all of the urban and suburban departments report that they have received some training in preparing for an attack involving weapons of mass destruction or biological and chemical agents. Less than half of the rural departments report that they have received training for an attack involving weapons of mass destruction or biological and chemical agents.
- Overwhelmingly, first responders in nearly every department say they lack the resources needed to do their jobs effectively. Top funding needs cited in urban and suburban departments were communications technology, protective gear, and personnel. Many rural departments also cited the need for training and enhanced water security.
- Many respondents also cited frustration with the funding process. Some departments say they have received less funding since the Department of Homeland Security was created and grant programs were shifted to the new agency. Others say they need better information about how to apply for grants.

These are among the comments made by first responders who responded to the survey:

"Local governments overnight have been faced with an enormous task...that we never conceived we would be faced with. Budgeting for equipment, training, and overtime is something we cannot meet without federal help."

"There [has] been much emphasis on talking about funding...however, the funds have been hard to get and they are too little to help us with huge communication problems."

"Our vulnerability is high and our resources are low."

"It is understood and accepted that the government cannot give out all details concerning national security. However, local law enforcement needs more information. We need information more than we need money."

"The general public receives the same information [on threat level updates] by watching an all news station on cable television."

"We have very little expectation of any meaningful assistance from the federal government."

"The current grant process is too top-down. Ideas need to come for the community and rise up as well."

"Assessments being required are fine as they show vulnerabilities; however, once a vulnerability is exposed, we are expected to take action. No money seems to be available to support these efforts. We continue to see increasing federal regulation with no increase in assistance in implementation. With local government being the first line of defense in any crisis rather than the bureaucracy in D.C., we need assistance monetarily to ensure readiness in all areas."

"Look at the smaller towns and communities. If something happens in the larger towns, these will be the people taking care of the situation."

"It is very difficult for small departments to compete with large departments when applying for grants. I would recommend that departments compete with other departments of similar size."

"A risk assessment needs to be done to determine which areas in the US are most vulnerable and therefore most in need of federal funding."

"When initial homeland security funding expires, it leaves agencies to bear the burden of maintaining and funding the position."

Full text of the Council on Foreign Relations "Emergency Responders: Drastically Underfunded, Dangerously Unprepared" is available online: http://www.cfr.org/pdf/Responders_TF.pdf

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